

What we claim is:

1. A method of providing specialized e-mail services to a sender, recipient or both, over a communications network, said method comprising the steps of:

on a computer operated by an e-mail sender, establishing an on-line session with a computer at an e-mail center;

by sender sending an e-mail packet including an e-mail message destined to a recipient together with a request for a specified verification e-mail service to the e-mail center;

from said e-mail center computer, transmitting the e-mail to an e-mail address accessible by a computer operated by a recipient,

said e-mail center receiving notification when said recipient at least receives said e-mail; and

providing, by e-mail center, at least requested e-mail notification to said sender.

2. A method as defined in claim 1, wherein said communication network comprises the Internet.

3. A method as defined in claim 1, wherein the user establishes a secure session with computer at e-mail center.

4. A method as defined in claim 1, wherein said session between the user and the e-mail center requires specified software, and further comprising the step of loading specified software

on the computer operated by sender.

5. A method as defined in claim 1, wherein said specialized e-mail services include at least one specialized service selected from the group consisting of:

- notification that e-mail was sent,
- notification that e-mail was received,
- notification that e-mail was opened,
- notification that e-mail was opened by intended recipient,
- notification of time and/or date of receipt and/or opening of e-mail,
- storage for future access of any selected notification information,
- storage of e-mail message contents for future access,
- verification of identity of sender,
- verification of identity of recipient.

6. A method as defined in claim 5, further comprising the step of transmitting by e-mail center requested specialized e-mail service to e-mail sender.

7. A method as defined in claim 5, further comprising the step of transmitting by e-mail center requested specialized e-mail service to e-mail recipient.

8. A method as defined in claim 1, further comprising the step of verifying the identity of sender and sending verification to e-mail center.

9. A method as defined in claim 8, further comprising sending verification of identity of sender to recipient with transmitted e-mail.

10. A method as defined in claim 9, wherein sender's identification verification is transmitted by the e-mail center to recipient pursuant to recipient's request.

11. A method as defined in claim 8, wherein verification is performed by use of biometric device associated with e-mail sender's computer.

12. A method as defined in claim 11, wherein sender's identity verification is obtained by checking sender's fingerprints.

13. A method as defined in claim 11, wherein sender's identity verification is obtained by checking sender's voice.

14. A method as defined in claim 11, wherein sender's identity verification is obtained by checking sender's anatomical features.

15. A method as defined in claim 1, further comprising the step of verifying the identity of recipient and sending verification to e-mail center.

16. A method as defined in claim 15, further comprising sending verification of identity

of recipient to sender with transmitted e-mail.

17. A method as defined in claim 16, wherein recipient's identification verification is transmitted by the e-mail center to sender pursuant to sender's request.

18. A method as defined in claim 15, wherein verification is performed by use of biometric device associated with e-mail recipient's computer.

19. A method as defined in claim 18, wherein recipient's identity verification is obtained by checking recipient's fingerprints.

20. A method as defined in claim 18, wherein recipient's identity verification is obtained by checking recipient's voice.

21. A method as defined in claim 18, wherein recipient's identity verification is obtained by checking recipient's anatomical features.

22. A method as defined in claim 1, further comprising the step of establishing by e-mail center whether recipient has capability of establishing special e-mail service requested by sender; and prompting recipient to download necessary application software to provide requisite capability prior to sending sender's e-mail.

23. A method as defined in claim 1, further comprising the step of establishing by e-mail center whether recipient has capability of establishing verification of recipient's identity when such verification is requested by sender; and prompting recipient to establish such capability prior to sending sender's e-mail.

24. A method as defined in claim 5, wherein sender only requests selected notification and/or verification, and notification and/or verification is provided to sender without storage of such notification and/or verification.

25. A method as defined in claim 5, wherein sender requests selected notification and/or verification, and further comprising the steps of providing requested notification and/or verification to sender and storing such requested notification and/or verification for future use and/or reference.

26. A method as defined in claim 25, wherein sender specifies the period of time for which the requested notification and/or verification is to be stored.

27. A method as defined in claim 5, wherein sender requests contents of e-mail message to be stored, and further comprising the step of storing contents of e-mail message for further use and/or reference.

28. A method as defined in claim 27, wherein sender specifies the period of time for

which the requested notification and/or verification is to be stored. (Compare claim 26.)

29. A method as defined in claim 28, wherein recipient requests verification of identity of sender prior to opening of e-mail; and further comprising the step of sending to recipient by e-mail center verification of identity of sender subsequent to transmission of e-mail to recipient.

30. An apparatus for providing specialized e-mail services to a sender, recipient or both, over a communications network, said apparatus comprising:

on a computer operated by an e-mail sender, means for establishing an on-line session with a computer at an e-mail center;

means for sending by sender an e-mail packet including an e-mail message destined to a recipient together with a request for a specified verification e-mail service to the e-mail center;

means for transmitting from said e-mail computer the e-mail to an e-mail address accessible by a computer operated by a recipient,

means for receiving notification from said e-mail center when said recipient at least receives said e-mail; and

means for providing, by e-mail center, at least requested e-mail notification to said sender.